# AFFIRMATION NEWSLETTER

FALL 1989

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## CHICAGO: FALL 1989 -- BOLDLY INTO THE FUTURE

The theme of this fall 's national Affirmation meeting was "Envisioning Our Future." Approximately 90 persons attended the meeting which was held at Hemenway UMC in Evanston, IL (near Chicago). The usual friendly Affirmation family spirit prevailed and we all greeted old acquaintances and met new folks, and had a great time!

The Friday evening session was an intensely personal sharing of our own journeys as well as the Affirmation journey, from its inception to the present. As we worshipped together, stones were passed out which symbolized all of life's "hard knocks." We chose whether or not to "let them go" into a container of water, or to keep them with us. After the service was over, we enjoyed an eclectic concert by Paula Berg.

Saturday began with inspirational group singing and sharing and then we broke up into small groups to discuss various aspects of the long-range plan. (Details on the long range plan can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.) In the small groups we were able to share our feelings and ideas in a more relaxed environment. Then, after another opportunity for worship and sharing, we broke away for an excellent lunch which was provided by some of the local RC's. After the lunch break we got back to business and spent a long, tiring afternoon working on the long range plan. Some of the items we dealt with included a slight change in our dues structure and an examination of the relationship between Affirmation and the Reconciling Congregation Program. (Details can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.) The majority of the time was spent looking at the long range plan, and some of the opinions expressed included noting that the phenomenal growth of Affirmation has necessitated a new way of organizing ourselves. Most people felt the long range planning committee had done a excellent job presenting their proposal. After a thorough discussion and a few amendments, the plan was adopted with a sense of triumph and great expectation for the future.

After the hard work of the afternoon session was over, we broke for a short while and then reconvened for a wonderful dinner which included a sing-a-long around the piano and fine Italian cuisine prepared by the Evanston and Rogers Park RC's. Our hats are off to the folks who prepared and served the meals, and cleaned up for the weekend.

Sunday was very special -- we began with another excellent breakfast and some last minute business. We then moved on to our traditional Affirmation closing group worship -- singing and sharing with one another. After this we joined the Hemenway congregation for their Sunday morning worship service. Some of our Affirmation folks joined the Hemenway choir to provide spiritually moving music during the service, and after this we all sang together and joined hands and just enjoyed being with one another. After the service was over, many folks joined together at a Mexican restaurant near the church for a buffet lunch and then left for home.

- Coordinating Committee

# BIG CHANGES FOR AFFIRMATION

A major outcome of the Chicago meeting was the approval by the membership of an entirely new way of operating National Affirmation. Up until now we have operated as a "committee of the whole, " with those in attendance at national meetings joining in to reach consensus on all the major decisions of Affirmation. With the tremendous growth of Affirmation, this has become unwieldy and entirely too time consuming. So, now we will move from a 10-member Coordinating Committee which carries out the decisions of the national meetings, to a 20-member Affirmation Council, with the power to make most of the decisions now made at the national meetings. This will free up the meetings to be mostly programmatic, which is what they were supposed to be. However, this means that a system had to be devised for better representation in voting than just those who attend national meetings. The plan decided upon is as follows:

> The Affirmation Council will consist of 10 members at large and 10 regional representatives. All shall be members of Affirmation, and the Council shall reflect gender parity. The 10 regional members shall be elected -- one from each of the 5 regions, and the other 5 allocated to the regions on the basis of membership. A Nominating committee will propose persons for both the regional and at-large positions and balloting shall be done by mail to all members of Affirmation.
>
> Members shall vote 1 + X (X representing the extra members allotted to some regions) person from their region, and for 10 members at large. Terms of office will be two years, and persons may hold up to three consecutive terms.

There are also slight changes in the relationship between National Affirmation and local Affirmation groups, mainly in spelling out some minimum criteria for affiliation. This will be spelled out for the local groups and will not affect any local group during the first year. The plan also included a vision and a mission statement that were quite helpful. We hope to share these with all of you in some future communication.

# Notice

This is to notify all members that there will be a vote on by-law changes at the Affirmation meeting in Kansas City next April.

# YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

Jeanne Barnett, a member of Affirmation, is a member of the Committee to study Homosexuality. Each Committee member is asked to read between 25-30 books. Jeanne is asking for help in this reading.

Each person, who wishes to help, would obtain their own copy of one of the books, read it and send Jeanne a report. The report should include a summary of key points, analysis of major positions and of course, your own personal views you would like to share with Jeanne. There will be about four books in each of the following subject: bible, biology/medical, ethics, psychiatry/psychology, sociology, theology, and human relations/arts. To help, please write to:

Jeanne Barnett
[redacted]
Sacramento, CA. [redacted]

Indicate the subject (or subjects) you are interested in. When the reading list is completed this year, Jeanne will let you know which book to read. There will be 2 or 3 months to complete the report. This is an opportunity for many of us to be a part of this study.

# COMMITTEE TO STUDY HOMOSEXUALITY

The task of a study on homosexuality is unique. The United Methodist Church has undertaken many studies of many subjects. However, when the church has studied subjects, dealing with human issues, the study has generally not been about people but of the social actions related to the subject. For example, the church studied sexism, not sex - racism, not race - and ageism, not age. Thus, the church could have studied heterosexism not homosexuality.

## Study Process on Homosexuality

*A study on homosexuality will be conducted during the quadrennium by GCOM. The text that follows was adopted as a substitute by the legislative committee and adopted by the General Conference:*

Whereas, human sexuality is affirmed by The United Methodist Church as a good gift from the God of love, but a gift that can contribute both to fulfillment and to brokenness among imperfect people; and

Whereas, the interpretation of homosexuality has proved to be particularly troubling to conscientious Christians of differing opinion; and

Whereas, important biblical, theological, and scientific questions related to homosexuality remain in dispute among persons of good will; and

Whereas, the church possesses the resources of mind and spirit to resolve such issues reasonably and in faithfulness to the gospel it proclaims:

Therefore, be it resolved that the General Council on Ministries be directed to conduct a study and report to the 1992 General Conference, using consultants as it deems appropriate, including persons representative of the major existing points of view on homosexuality within the church and persons well-versed in scientific and theological method. The council shall:

a]Study homosexuality as a subject for theological and ethical analysis, noting where is consensus among biblical scholars, theologians, and ethictists and where there is not.

b]Seek the best biological, psychological, and sociological information and opinion on the nature of homosexuality, noting points at which there is a consensus among informed scientists and where there is not.

c]Explore the implications of its study for the Social Principles.

Be it further resolved that this action become effective immediately upon the adjournment of the 1988 General Conference. [Petition # 341; ADCD p. D-2-14 - Calendar Item 348; DCA p. 183-4 - Debated and adopted p. 454-6]

The petition adopted by General Conference is printed in its entirety here. GCOM asked for a scientific and theological study in order to help the church more clearly understand where there is consensus and where there is not. The committee first met in Feb.1989 in Dallas, Texas and discussed at length the task and prepared a statement of purpose, which was accepted as a working understanding.

## Affirmation Spokespersons

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The Affirmation Newsletter is printed four times a year. Deadline for the spring issue is on **March 10, 1990**. All articles must be received by this date in order to be printed in the Spring issue. Opinions and comments are welcome. Mailing address is:

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THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Purpose Statement as revised by the Drafting Committee was presented and discussed. By consensus it was a working document recognized as a draft of the Committee's attempt to identify Issues/Themes and Questions, noting that the four goals listed are equally important and not in priority order:

## Statement Of Purpose

A Working Understanding of the Task
of the
Committee to Study Homosexuality

In response to the mandate of the 1988 General Conference our aim is to assist The United Methodist Church in the process of discerning God's purpose for the church's relationship with Homosexual persons.

Our goal is to create a study document which will:

Articulate the major theological, ethical, and scientific perspectives on homosexuality with integrity and respect.

Analyze the arguments used in support of each perspective with particular attention to how each makes use of scripture, experience, tradition, and reaso

Identify where there is consensus and disagreement among these perspectiv

Reflect upon the meaning of our study for the Social Principles.

The committee states its purpose is to create a study document. The document will clearly state what the major views are on homosexuality today. Thus different, divergent, even opposite positions on homosexuality will be included. The analysis of these various positions will certainly be very important.
To gather data the committee selected seven subject areas: biblical, biological/medical, ethical, psychiatric/psychological, sociological, theological, and human relations/arts. The committee members identified their areas of interest and began their work.
The second meeting of the committee was July 31 - August 3, 1989 in Denver, CO. The major portion of this meeting covered the work in the subject areas with each group reporting back to the whole committee. The committee also heard the stories of a panel of counselors and ex-gays from "Where Grace Abounds", a group affiliated with Exodus International. Each member will be asked to read 2 to 4 books in each subject area. The committee is contacting experts to make presentations at future meetings. The next meeting will be Nov. 30 - Dec. 3, 1989 in Atlanta, Georgia. The focus of this meeting will be hearing from various groups in the

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## Committee to Study Homosexuality

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church. The following groups have been invited to speak: Good News, Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Reconciling Congregations and Transforming Congregations. In addition, there will be a panel of gays, couples and singles, who will tell their stories to the committee.

Bible, theology, and ethics will be the subjects at the March 9-12, 1990 meeting. Psychiatry, medical and sociology will be the subject areas for the August 2-5, 1990 meeting. Human relations and the arts will be part of each meeting. The remaining three meetings will be to work on the committee s report. This report will be made to the General Council on Ministries, who in turn will report to the 1992 General Conference.

Affirmation plans to stay in close contact with the committee and will continue to bring you future reports.

- Jeanne Barnett

## Spring Meeting
## Everything's Up To Date In Kansas City

The spring Affirmation meeting is scheduled for April 20, 21, and 22 in Kansas City, Missouri. K.C. Affirmation and Kansas Affirmation are cooperating in putting this meeting together and have some exciting plans both for program and entertainment. More on details in latter newsletter.

## COORDINATING COMMITTEE TO MEET

Part of the action taken at the Chicago meeting was to extend the terms of the current coordinating committee members until next September, and to charge the committee with the task of fleshing out the actions for change, especially in terms of new by-laws. The committee expects this to be a long, tiresome task beginning with a meeting in Washington, DC on January 13-15. It appears they will also need to hold meetings both in March and prior to the general meeting in Kansas City in April. Please get your input to one of the Coordinating Committee members as soon as possible, prior to the January meeting.

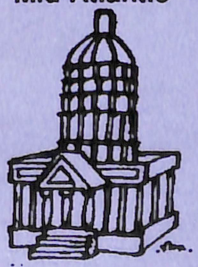
## AROUND THE CONNECTION

**Dallas** -- Jane Marshall, one of the finest musicians in UM music, was the speaker for the September meeting. She introduced the group to the new UM hymnal. Many of the Dallas members are very interested in music so we know they must have enjoyed this program. Those of you who attended the meeting in Dallas last April will certainly remember the group. The Group also participated in a Walk for AIDS and went camping in November.

**Central Virginia** -- In September the group had a pig roast over the Labor Day Weekend and then planned a love feast to celebrate their first anniversary!

**Seattle** -- The group went on a nature hike in the mountains last September and also had a pot luck meeting featuring a video by John Boswell entitled, "1500 Years of the Church Blessing Gay/Lesbian Relationships: It's Nothing New. " Sounds interesting. The group also participated in an interfaith service for those affected by AIDS, and were planning to travel to Spokane to try to encourage some of the local congregations to participate in the RC Program. We wish them luck.

**Mid-Atlantic** -- Speaking of anniversaries, Mid-Atlantic celebrated TEN YEARS in October with worship and a dinner. This is one of the oldest and most active local chapters and we certainly rejoice with them in this milestone.



## NEW RELATIONSHIP ANTICIPATED BETWEEN RCP AND AFFIRMATION

The membership of Affirmation were told of three possible styles of relationship between the Reconciling Congregation Program (RCP) and Affirmation. These came out of a joint meeting in August between persons representing both groups and National Affirmation and the Advisory Committee of the RCP. Boiled down to their essentials, the three plans are as follows:

1) Affirmation and the RCP become separate and distinct organizations with Affirmation naming a specified number of members of the RCP's governance structure.
2) The RCP remains under the legal umbrella of Affirmation but is given as much autonomy as is legally practical.
3) Affirmation and the RCP become separate organizations with cooperation at the program and work area level.

Option #2 was the overwhelming favorite of meeting participants as well as the RCP Advisory Committee. The joint committee of National Affirmation and the RCP Advisory Committee will get together again prior to the April meeting and come to us with a formal proposal to effect a new structure.

## CHANGE ALWAYS HURTS A LITTLE: AN "OLD TIMER" LOOKS BACK

Affirmation and I go way back -- over 10 years -- and it has been a real love affair. National Affirmation came along for me as I was just coming out and it was a life-saver. For years I looked forward to those twice-yearly meetings with kindred souls as the only life-line I had to sanity. The rest of the year I felt "out there on my own." The wonderful people I met became family for me, and I rejoice every time I see them. And it wasn't just the individuals but the kind of organization Affirmation was, that made it special for me. Dealing with the church and all its game-playing, really wore me out. But when I went to Affirmation meetings, where even the most difficult decisions were made gently, consensus ruled, and people counted. It was wonderful!

Unfortunately, nothing lasts forever. But the good news is that Affirmation is out there for more and more people nowadays. This wonderful life-line has wrapped itself around a coast-to-coast collection of nutty, fun, hurting, caring, out-cast, powerful, rejoicing people. Let's face it gang: whole-group consensus just doesn't work with that large of a crowd. So our structure had to change. I came to Chicago with fear and trembling because I felt I had so much of me invested in the old way of doing things that I wasn't going to like any plan that was presented -- though I would probably have gone along with it as a necessary evil. But, 10 and behold, it really wasn't bad at all! I felt that if change had to come (and it did), then this new plan tried to hold on to as many of our old values as possible. I found I could not only could live with it -- but I liked it in spite of myself!

I'll still mourn the passing of some of our old ways but I'll move on with faith into what I hope will be an even greater future for Affirmation. Pardon us old-timers if we sometimes wax nostalgic about the "Old Days," but, after all, the "old days" got us this far and the new ways will hopeful get us even farther along in our journey. That's the joy of change.

-Coordinating Committee

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